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USNPGS Academic Dean -- Dr. Rinehart

Classmate Magazine; Rinehart, Robert F.; Pyle, Judy

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Outstanding Young Woman of America

To Weave A Yarn



Mrs. Buskirk at her loom.

Could I interest you in the magic formula for becoming a successful woman? I wish I could, but there isn't one. One way, though, is to take a talented and eager girl, give her many years of schooling, a challenging and exciting job, a teaching position, marry her to a most compactable man and bless her with two little girls. What have you got then? You have Mary Buskirk, who is without a doubt not only a most successful woman but an exceptional person.

Mary Buskirk is a tall, dignified woman whose charming laugh and calm, quiet ways belie what a really important woman she is in her area of the arts. I'm sure others are far more impressed with her than she is with herself. Her home seems to mirror her talents and her responsibility. It is an airy house, windows along one entire side facing a thick and lush forest which seems to be inside instead of out. And everywhere, is evidence of Mary Buskirk's exceptional talent.

Her woven rugs, warm and inviting are scattered in several rooms, her tapestry hangings are tastefully distributed throughout the house, each one original and a study in creativity.

Mrs. Buskirk was born in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, as Mary Balzer. She was an art major at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota where, she laughingly says, "I was hardly the world's best painter." She took a job teaching art to children and although she is very fond of them, found she wasn't "tempermen-

tally suited" for that type of work. So, she felt teaching older students might be better. But, since even good artists weren't getting college teaching jobs easily, she felt returning for a Masters Degree would be the answer. She studied at the University of Minnesota but finally turned to the Cranbrook Art Academy near Detroit. This is where fate took a hand and together with destiny, began moulding her future. Besides painting, she felt a course in crafts would be beneficial, but since it was late August when she applied, only the weaving course was open. "To be honest," she said while discussing this happy accident, "I really didn't even consider weaving before. It was purely accidental, actually a practical measure." Of course, this is really where her story begins as she quickly realized that this was her place in the arts.

She finished Cranbrook with a Masters of Fine Arts degree, and was invited to

organize the weaving department at the Cleveland Institute of Art. It was a studio of sixteen looms and she feels a very important part of her life.

This is where Fred R. Buskirk entered the picture. They met while he was at Case Institute of Technology doing post graduate work. Apparently Mr. Buskirk was mightily impressed by his future wife's talents. He jokingly tells he married her because he couldn't afford to buy "the stuff" she makes.

The Buskirks spent most of their lives living in mid-Eastern United States, but they had an enduring desire to come west. That chance came when Professor Buskirk was offered a position at the Navy PGS. They have been here five years now. Professor Buskirk is an associate professor in the Physics Department and this is where they hope to make their permanent home.

It is noticeable that Mrs. Buskirk favors the abstract. I questioned this, and she explained "because I feel weaving is an abstract medium, an interplay of yarns and textures." Despite early training as a painter, Mrs. Buskirk doesn't compare it



Throw rug and 2 pillows woven by Mrs. Buskirk add color to a playroom

to weaving. She admits a knowledge of painting is invaluable, but weaving is another concept of art, a more physical one. Also, she feels paintings are priced far too high. Her works for example, are priced

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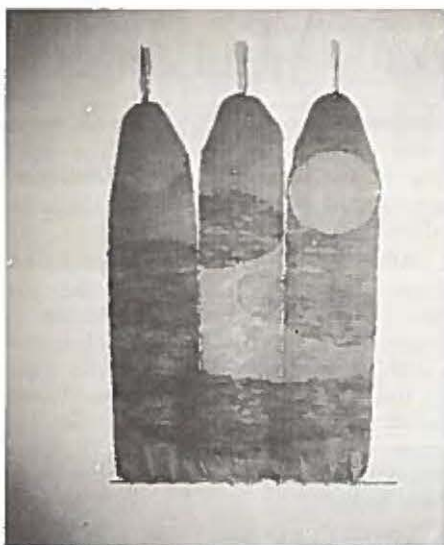
Boys' sizes to 6X

Girls' sizes to 14

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One of Mrs. Buskirk's favorites . . . a wall hanging with a medieval feeling.

anywhere from \$35 to \$350. She feels that is "not expensive compared to paintings, and prices are inflated." She prices her works on how successful she thinks it turned out, size, actual working time, whatever in her own mind she uses for evaluation. It is also in this way that she creates. Usually, she makes no drawings or plans previous to starting on creations. Oh, of course, she has a basic idea as to texture, colors, weight and type, but the largest part of it is in her mind waiting to be transferred and transformed into a work of art.

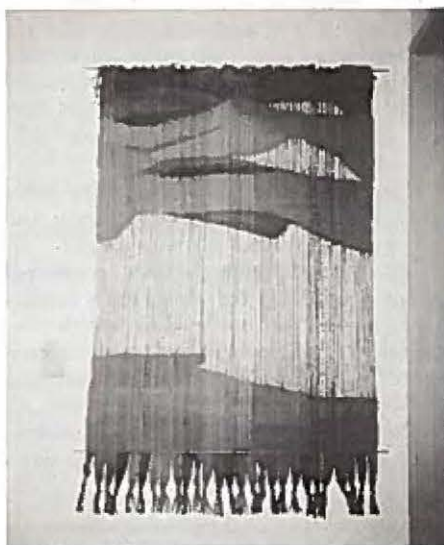
Naturally, when you work with such a sense of freedom, you require a sizeable stock of materials. This, Mary Buskirk does have. One room has a long glass-front cabinet, about five feet in length and three shelves high, full only of various colors and types of yarn. I also saw boxes and boxes just brimming with more spools of materials to choose from. Since moving west, buying these materials has become a problem, as Mary Buskirk has spent many happy hours haunting the mill-end houses, warehouses and the odd lot stores of New York's famed garment district. Her chief source of supply now is in San Francisco although she still orders from the east.

There is nothing instant when you weave. It takes a lot of time and patience from beginning to end. The loom itself is a large apparatus resembling the inside of a piano with too many giant footpedals and no keyboard. Like most things, they come in degrees of worth and vary considerably in complexity and quality. The design of the loom is very important and I am told a well made simple model could be had for \$100. Of course, this price climbs steadily depending on the loom. There are even light-weight portable models, perfect for the nomadic existence a service wife leads.

But ideally, the beginner should start in a class, where the initial cost of the loom would be eliminated and yarns bought at discount prices. Of course, for the really avid person who simply wants to weave more than anything, private lessons can solve this problem. There are weavers guilds scattered throughout the country from which a prospective student could obtain names of teachers.

Mrs. Buskirk keeps up-to-date in her craft by belonging to the American Craftsman Council. This nationwide group publishes a widely read bi-monthly magazine.

How does a weaver become known to



Transparent wall hanging interpreting the land, sea and mountains of Monterey

the public? Well, mainly through galleries, museums and exhibitions. Presently, Mrs. Buskirk has hangings in the permanent collections of the Oakland Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. She has had displays in local galleries and other galleries and museums around the country. As to those who purchase her works, most often they are friends or acquaintances who admire a hanging in her home or ask for one to be fashioned for them. In these cases, Mary Buskirk will listen to the theme and color scheme of the home for which the tapestry is intended, but the restrictions end there. This, she calls, "the privilege of not having to depend upon this means for my livelihood." She does not like to take orders but needs the freedom of letting each piece grow naturally. Of course, as with even the greatest artists, there have been a few very dismal failures during her career. "But these," says Mary Buskirk, "will never see the light of day and are safely tucked away." She doesn't like to sell any piece with which she is not completely satisfied. She said it would make her "uncomfortable" to enter a home which displayed one of her less successful pieces.

In addition to all this, Mary Buskirk is the mother of two young children, Martha who is nearly five and Janet, a year and a half. Through their eyes, she has seen a glimpse of the young creative mind. Janet is still too young to be other than curious but Martha has shown a keen interest in the loom and her mother's work. Mrs. Buskirk feels her oldest is quite artistic and has seen Martha make colored wall hangings to compare with the woven works of art. These, Mrs. Buskirk says, have many times been "quite delightful."

Through her children, another field of interest has opened. Having sent Martha to nursery school last year, Mrs. Buskirk felt "left out" by merely chauffeuring her to and from school. The answer was the new Peninsula Parents Cooperative Nursery which operates at St. Timothy's Lutheran Church and of which, Mary Buskirk is Vice President. Now, she too can enjoy, first hand, the accomplishments of her child at school.

But Mary Buskirk is hardly unsung. Despite numerous awards, none of which Mrs. Buskirk even modestly mentioned, she has recently been selected to appear in the 1966 edition of "Outstanding Young Women of America." It is an annual biographical compilation sponsored by leaders of women's organizations. The honorary chairman of its board of advisory editors is Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson.

And there you have a glimpse of another talent in our midst. Mary Buskirk is a refreshing reminder to all of us that "successful" is not necessarily an exclusively masculine adjective.

—Liz Davies

Armond

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